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SUPERPOWER RIVALRY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

By Paul George

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PREFACE

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Paul George is a doctoral candidate in the programme for strategic and international studies at the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva.

CONDENSÉ

Le Canada n'assure aucune présence militaire dans l'océan Indien, et au premier coup d'oeil, l'évolution de la conjoncture stratégique de la région ne paraît comporter aucun danger pour lui. Malgré tout, les événements ayant cours dans l'océan Indien influent sensiblement sur les politiques économique et extérieure de notre pays ainsi que sur sa politique de défense, et il convient que les Canadiens et Canadiennes soient conscients de l'importance de la région pour leurs intérêts nationaux.

De nombreux partenaires du Canada appartenant au Commonwealth sont situés dans la région, et les liens qui les unissent à notre pays sur les plans culturel et économique et en matière d'aide continueront de croître. Les produits énergétiques du golfe Persique ne sont pas d'une importance vitale pour le Canada, mais ils sont essentiels au bien-être de beaucoup de nos amis et alliés. De toute évidence, toute interruption dans l'acheminement des produits pétroliers du Golfe nuirait à l'économie canadienne.

Afin de garantir l'acheminement libre du pétrole vers les pays occidentaux industrialisés, les États-Unis ont assumé un rôle militaire grandissant dans l'océan Indien au cours des dernières années. L'Union soviétique s'est elle aussi, pour ses propres fins stratégiques, imposée activement dans la région. En un premier temps, les États-Unis et l'Union soviétique ont tout simplement intégré cette nouvelle zone au contexte mondial où s'affirme leur rivalité, mais en un deuxième temps, l'océan Indien en soi est devenu, cela est clair, une de leurs préoccupations bien particulières. Dans le document suivant, l'auteur analyse le rôle que les superpuissances jouent dans l'océan Indien et il évalue les tendances qui s'y manifestent.

Après qu'en 1968, les Britanniques eurent décidé de se retirer de tout territoire situé à "l'Est de Suez", l'activité militaire de l'URSS et des États-Unis s'est graduellement intensifiée dans l'océan Indien. Une série d'événements survenus à la fin des années 1970 (la guerre d'Ogaden dans la Corne de l'Afrique, la révolution iranienne et l'invasion de l'Afghanistan par les troupes soviétiques) ont donné à l'océan Indien la prépondérance dans la rivalité stratégique qui oppose les deux superpuissances à l'échelle mondiale. Afin de préserver leurs rapports politiques avec les pays de la région ainsi que leurs intérêts mondiaux en matière de sécurité, ces dernières ont augmenté leurs déploiements navals dans l'océan Indien en y installant des bases et en y obtenant des droits d'accès. C'est ainsi que la région est devenue une composante essentielle de la rivalité stratégique entre Moscou et Washington.

L'auteur du document met l'accent sur le rapport existant entre la présence des superpuissances dans l'océan Indien, d'une part, et, d'autre part, les conflits régionaux qui les ont tant préoccupées pendant la dernière décennie. Le document fait d'abord l'historique des interventions extérieures dans l'océan Indien, et il définit la région dans son contexte géographique. Puis, à la faveur d'une analyse chronologique des activités américaines et soviétiques, l'auteur montre comment l'océan Indien est passé du statut de région à faible importance stratégique à celui de zone clef dans le jeu stratégique opposant l'Est et l'Ouest.

Pour terminer, l'auteur examine l'incidence de la conjoncture géostratégique en évolution sur les relations régionales en matière de sécurité. Des changements rapides survenus au cours des derniers mois ont considérablement atténué les tensions régionales, et tout porte à croire que la région retrouvera son statut stratégique secondaire dans les relations américano-soviétiques. L'auteur fait valoir que le

moment est venu pour les États-Unis et l'URSS de reprendre des pourparlers bilatéraux en vue de limiter leur présence navale dans l'océan Indien.

Le retrait des troupes soviétiques présentes en Afghanistan et la fin de la guerre irano-irakienne offriront aux deux superpuissances de nouvelles occasions de collaborer davantage pour préserver la stabilité dans la région. Le règlement de ces conflits coïncide avec une intervention stratégique accrue par certains États du littoral dans les affaires de la région. Celle-ci conservera donc son importance stratégique pour les superpuissances, mais l'objet de leur attention va changer. L'auteur du document s'interroge sur les conséquences des rivalités locales pour la paix et la sécurité internationales, et il soutient que Moscou et Washington devront collaborer dans l'avenir pour préserver leur intérêts dans l'océan Indien.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada does not have a military presence in the Indian Ocean, nor is it conspicuously threatened by strategic developments in the region. Nevertheless, events in the Indian Ocean have an important impact in Canada's economic, foreign, and defence policies and Canadians should be aware of the significance of the region to their national interests.

The Indian Ocean is home to many of Canada's partners in the Commonwealth and strong cultural, economic and aid ties will continue to grow with the region. The energy supplies of the Persian Gulf are not of crucial importance to Canada but they are vital to the economic well-being of many of our friends and allies. Obviously, any interruption of the supplies of oil from the Gulf, would have a negative impact on Canada's economy.

To preserve the free-flow of oil to the Western industrial economies, the United States has played a growing military role in the Indian Ocean in recent years. The Soviet Union has also been active in the region for its own strategic purposes. At one level, the United States and the Soviet Union have simply incorporated a new region into their broader global rivalry. However, the Indian Ocean itself has clearly become an object of their attention in its own right. The following paper surveys the role of the superpowers in the Indian Ocean and assesses future trends in the region.

After the British decided to withdraw from "East of Suez" in 1968, the Indian Ocean saw a steady increase in military activity by the Soviet Union and the United States. A series of events at the end of the 1970s--the Ogaden War in the Horn of Africa, the Iranian revolution, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan--combined to bring the Indian Ocean to the forefront of global strategic rivalry between the US and the

USSR. In order to support their regional political relationships and global security interests, the United States and the Soviet Union augmented their naval deployments in the Indian Ocean through the development of bases and access arrangements. As a result, the region became pivotal to the strategic rivalry between the superpowers.

The paper focusses on the interaction between the presence of the superpowers in the Indian Ocean and the regional conflicts which have caused them so much concern in the last decade. The paper first presents an historical survey of external involvement in the Indian Ocean and defines the region in its geographical context. Then, in a chronological assessment of the activities of the United States and the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean region, it is shown how the Indian Ocean moved from being an area of low strategic priority, to one at the forefront of the strategic competition between East and West.

Finally, the paper considers the impact of changing geostrategic circumstances on regional security relationships. Rapidly moving events in the last few months have reduced regional tensions considerably and the way seems open for the superpowers to return the Indian Ocean area to its former low level of strategic interest in their relations. It is argued that the time is ripe for a return to bilateral discussions aimed at limiting the superpower's naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the ultimate end of the Iran-Iraq war, will present new opportunities for greater superpower cooperation in maintaining stability in the region. The resolution of these conflicts coincides with an increased strategic involvement in the affairs of the region by certain littoral states. Therefore, the Indian Ocean will remain strategically significant to the superpowers, but the

focus of their attention will change. The paper considers the implications for international peace and security of continuing local rivalries and argues that the superpowers need to cooperate in order to meet future challenges to their interests in the Indian Ocean region.

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INTRODUCTION

For most of the last decade the Indian Ocean region has played a significant role in the global strategic rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The threat posed to the energy supplies of the Persian Gulf by events such as the Iranian Revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Iran-Iraq war, induced the United States to increase its naval capability in the Indian Ocean. Since the late 1970s, the US naval base on the island of Diego Garcia has seen steady expansion and US warships, including carrier battle groups, are now permanently deployed in the region. Because the Indian Ocean is an essential transhipment route between European Russia and the Soviet Far East, the presence of powerful US naval forces in the Indian Ocean is a legitimate strategic concern to the Soviets. Moreover, US power projection capability, particularly in the north-west quadrant of the ocean, poses a potentially significant threat to important areas of the Soviet Union.

On the surface, these factors would seem sufficient explanation for the de ree of concern which both superpowers have shown towards the Indian Ocean in recent years. However, the situation is more complex than simple strategic rivalry and the military activities of the last decade appear to be out of keeping with the historical pattern of behaviour in the region.

Geography and politics influence the superpowers' approaches to their regional security concerns. The United States is essentially limited to supporting its allies through the deployment of naval forces to areas of tension. Washington maintains an autonomous military presence from its major facility at Diego Garcia, with minimal reliance on certain friendly littoral states for rest-and-recreation and some supply functions. It is a maritime strategy designed to

secure the sea lines of communication and capable of projecting enormous military power into the littoral. For its part, the Soviet Union has pursued a policy of land-based military aid and intervention. It is a strategy designed to secure strategic areas--in the Horn, South Yemen, and Afghanistan--with minimal emphasis on developing its maritime assets. The Soviets have shown a greater willingness to influence events militarily, particularly through the use of proxy forces, such as the Cubans in the Horn of Africa, but also with their own troops in Afghanistan.

Both superpowers have chosen to intervene in the affairs of the region for different strategic reasons. However, inasmuch as the United States and the Soviet Union have frequently expressed interest in local disputes in the Indian Ocean, this has not led to any significant increase in tension between them. By and large, they have successfully balanced their global security requirements with the need to promote the interests of their regional allies.

A closer examination of the activities of the superpowers in the Indian Ocean suggests that their main purpose is not to counter each other, but rather to support their regional allies and to act as a deterrent against local attempts to upset the balance of power. In fact, the nature of their involvement suggests that their overriding interests are not dissimilar. The superpowers have a common interest in containing local conflicts in order to promote global security. Therefore, although the Indian Ocean is an area of increasing relevance to Washington's and Moscow's global competition, its import is primarily geopolitical, not geostrategic.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the development of the geopolitical relationship between the superpowers in the Indian Ocean region. The Indian Ocean encompasses a complex geopolitical region in which three over-arching axes of conflict--East-West, Sino-Soviet, and North-South--complicate the work of the analyst.[1] Therefore, the paper will first present an historical survey of external involvement in the Indian Ocean and define the region in its geographical context. Second, there will be a chronological assessment of the activities of the United States and the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean region. It will be shown that a steady increase in superpower involvement led to a situation, in the late 1970s, whereby the Indian Ocean moved from being an area of low strategic priority, to one at the forefront of the strategic competition between East and West.

Finally, the paper will assess the impact of changing geostrategic circumstances on regional security relationships. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the ultimate end of the Iran-Iraq war present new opportunities for greater superpower cooperation in maintaining stability in the Indian Ocean region. However, the resolution of these conflicts coincides with an increased level of strategic involvement by certain littoral states which is likely to draw renewed superpower attention to regional security issues.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

An assessment of "Superpower Rivalry in the Indian Ocean" implies that the cohesion of the Indian Ocean as a region is recognized for policy purposes. In fact, this is not as

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[1] See: Dieter Braun, The Indian Ocean, London: C. Hurst & Co., 1983, and Lawrence Ziring, The Subcontinent in World Politics, New York: Praeger, 1982.

straightforward as it might seem. The question of whether the Indian Ocean is a region has been the frequent subject of debate.[2] Geographically, there is a certain wholeness to the area in that it is enclosed, except for its southern extremities, by land masses whose physical properties have tended to prevent the littoral states from developing close relations with the hinterland.[3] However, in cultural, linguistic, or religious terms the different groups surrounding the Indian Ocean have little in common. Similarly, in terms of their political and economic interaction, the littoral states have not developed close ties. Whether the lack of cohesion is a product of an historical underdeveloped level of communication between the various sub-units, or if the influence of outside forces has hindered such development, cannot readily be determined. However, if the littoral states have not felt the need for greater cohesion in the Indian Ocean, outside forces have clearly recognized the advantages

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[2] For example, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs has suggested four divisions of the Indian Ocean area: 1) East Africa and the ocean region east of it; 2) the northwest from Somalia around Iran, including the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Persian Gulf; 3) the Asian Subcontinent and the sea southward; 4) Southeast Asia and Australia. This and other examples of attempts to regionalize the ocean can be found in: Ferenc A. Vali, Politics of the Indian Ocean Region, New York: The Free Press, 1976, p. 28.

[3] Several physical conditions have historically limited the development of communications between the littoral states and the hinterland. In East Africa there are few rivers giving access to the interior, deserts in the Horn of Africa and in the Arabian Peninsula have further restricted movement. In South Asia the formidable barriers of the Hindu Kush and Himalayas present obvious problems. The lush tropical forests and rugged terrain of Burma and Thailand, make travel difficult and, the vast deserts of Western Australia separate the Indian Ocean coast of that continent from its major population centres. Ibid, pp. 33-34.

of pursuing a regional approach to it.[4] The Indian Ocean historically, and now in modern times, has simply become caught up in the cross-fire of extra-regional rivalries.

Since the European explorers first sailed into the Indian Ocean in the fifteenth century, there have been a succession of extra-regional players interested in the unity of the ocean for trade, imperial, or strategic purposes.[5] Over the centuries this extra-regional attention led to competition and conflict as the European powers sought to secure economic, strategic and political dominance over the affairs of the Indian Ocean states. This led to overlapping rivalries and interests in areas adjacent to, but not of, the Indian Ocean. Therefore, not only is there a long history of extra-regional intervention in the Indian Ocean, there is also an overriding degree of intra-regional and inter-regional interdependence to the area which presents unique problems for the analyst.

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[4] It is interesting to compare the British and American approaches in this regard. Whereas the British did not treat the Indian Ocean as a region for administrative purposes, militarily they adopted a de facto regional approach. The Indian Ocean became a "British Lake" because the Royal Navy controlled the access points to it from its bases at Singapore, Aden and Simonstown. Ibid, pp. 15-16. In the State Department, the United States has three regional bureaus dealing with different areas of the Indian Ocean littoral. Militarily, responsibilities are split between the Commander in Chief Pacific, in Hawaii, and the US Commander in charge of American land forces in Europe. Central Command, based in Florida, is responsible for the Gulf and Horn of Africa as well as Pakistan--thus dividing military responsibilities for South Asia.

[5] External involvement in the Indian Ocean occurred much earlier, of course. For example, the Phoenicians, Sumerians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and the Arabs all explored and traded in the region. However, the modern, or post-Gaman, era begins in 1498 when the Portugese under Vasco Da Gama sailed to Calicut in India. See: Auguste Toussaint, History of the Indian Ocean, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, pp. 12-100.

For example, the Persian Gulf is geographically of the Indian Ocean, as are the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, and the Gulf of Aqaba. Similarly, Egypt, Iraq, and Israel are Indian Ocean states by definition, in that they have coastlines bordering on waters directly connected to the Indian Ocean proper.[6] However, as none of the above can be separated from the conflict in the Middle East, it is axiomatic that any consideration of their role in the Indian Ocean region must also take into account the level of interaction with political and strategic developments which have their roots elsewhere.

Nor are such problems confined to the Middle East-Indian Ocean interface. In South East Asia, the affairs of Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia are inexorably tied to the wider ideological struggle in Indochina between China, Vietnam and the Soviet Union. In South Asia, Soviet activity in Afghanistan has led to an enhanced United States interest in the area, just as Russian designs on the same country attracted the attention of the British in the nineteenth century. In turn, the activities of the superpowers influence Indo-Pakistani, Indo-American, Sino-Indian, and Sino-Soviet relations. Any growth in Indo-Pakistani rivalry, for example, naturally attracts the attention of China, Pakistan's ally. This then arouses the interest and concerns of the Soviet Union, India's ally. And so it goes.[7] In this sense, the

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[6] There are 36 Indian Ocean states: Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burma, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Malagasy, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Yemen (North and South).

[7] Professor Lincoln Bloomfield of MIT presented the following scenario to a Senate Committee in 1976: "To give only a few examples of the possible consequences of US policy,

United States and the Soviet Union are but the latest extra-regional powers to express their interests in the Indian Ocean in broad geostrategic terms.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. The United States and the Indian Ocean Region

Despite often cited remarks that the United States has a relationship with the Indian Ocean going back to the end of the 18th century, when Boston whalers ventured into the region,[8] it was during the Second World War that the Indian Ocean saw the first sustained US presence, as a supply route to the Soviet Union through Iran. During the war, a US Middle East command was established in the Persian Gulf with about 40,000 troops. In 1949, the Middle East Command was transformed into a simple naval presence consisting of three antiquated vessels stationed at a British base on Bahrain. This small naval force, known as the Middle East Force (MIDEASTFOR), exists today and has weathered all of the crises

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heavily armed Muslems allied with Pakistan will surely give India a continuing incentive to counter such buildups by means of its Soviet connection. The policy could make Afghanistan once again a pawn in renewed Cold War competition. A major US politico-military position in the Gulf gives Moscow the necessary excuse to offer arms and protection and thus give influence, in the Horn of Africa, the southern shores of the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean." US Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Subcommittee on Foreign Assistance. Foreign Assistance Authorization, Arms Sales Issues, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, Washington: US GPO, 1976, p. 98.

[8] A treaty of commerce and navigation was also signed between the United States and the Sultan of Muscat and Oman in 1832 but the relationship with the region in the modern era is considered to have begun in 1932, when US companies began to explore for oil in Bahrain. See: speech by Ambassador Newsom at Georgetown University, 11 April 1980, Department of State Bulletin , Vol. 80, No. 2041, August 1980, p. 62.

affecting US-Arab relations in the interval.[9] Also in the Gulf, the United States and Saudi Arabia signed an agreement in 1951 giving the Strategic Air Command access to the airfield at Dahran. These arrangements have proved to be fortuitous as the United States has consistently been able to claim, when challenged, that it is not an interfering "Johnny-come-lately," but that it has maintained a long-standing permanent military presence in the region.[10]

Away from the Gulf, the United States entered into a 25-year agreement to establish a link in its global military communications network and constructed a facility in the Eritrean region of Ethiopia in 1953. The US military influence in Ethiopia was to remain strong until the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie, in 1974.[11] Early in the post-war period, therefore, the United States had demonstrated an embryonic strategic interest in the Indian Ocean region, albeit confined to the north-west quadrant.[12] Nevertheless,

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[9] The location of MIDEASTFOR in the Gulf simply confirms where the real US interest in the region lies. Access to the energy supplies of the Gulf has always determined US policy towards the region. The Indian Ocean is, of itself, of little military importance to the United States. See: US Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. United States Foreign Policy Objectives and Overseas Military Installations, Washington: US GPO, 1979, p. 84.

[10] See: Statement by Seymour Weiss, Director, Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs, Department of State Bulletin, 8 April 1974, p. 371.

[11] Kagnew Station was closed in 1977. The United States claimed that the facility was superfluous; Ethiopia claims to have evicted the Americans.

[12] US support of the monarchies of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia became known as the "Three Kings Principle." The relationship revolved around three basic shared goals: resisting foreign and domestic threats; active opposition to

it could hardly be described as an excessive display of force, or of interest, and the purpose of these arrangements had more to do with the concern of the United States for its position in the Middle East than the Indian Ocean.

The key to the lack of a greater US military presence was, of course, the predominance of the British in the Indian Ocean. In simple terms, the Indian Ocean region was perceived by Washington to be a British responsibility which, from a historical perspective, was accurate. In the first fifteen years or so after the Second World War, the United States was content to keep a low profile in the region in order to focus its attention on more pressing areas of strategic concern, such as western Europe and Korea. As a result, the Indian Ocean was not in the spotlight of the greater US rivalry with the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the region was viewed as an area where Soviet expansionism had to be checked and, as such, the Indian Ocean featured strongly in the development of Containment Policy.[13]

The most important role of the Indian Ocean in this early period lay in its contribution to the growth of the policy of containing communist expansionism through the development of regional collective security arrangements. Whereas, initial-

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Soviet expansionism; and, the coordination of responses to common problems. See: Michael Ledeen and William Lewis, Debacle: The American Failure in Iran, New York: Vintage Books, 1982, p. 86.

[13] US security interests and policy objectives in the region have changed little over the years: 1) Containment of Soviet military power; 2) Access to Persian Gulf oil; 3) Freedom of movement for US vessels into and out of the Gulf. See: US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Foreign Policy Objectives and Overseas Military Installations, Washington: US GPO, 1979, p. 110-111. Therefore, in the Indian Ocean context, containment can be considered as an established response to the historical pressure on the region from the Russians/Soviets to the north.

ly, the focus of containment was on the Middle East, the infrastructural arrangements developed in support of it were to have profound implications for subsequent US policy towards the major littoral states of the Indian Ocean, India and Pakistan, and for the region as a whole.

Before containment became the guiding light of US foreign policy, there had been concern over the future intentions of the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean region. As part of the arrangement whereby lend-lease aid was passed to the Soviets during the war, the British and the Russians had occupied Iran. At the end of the war the Soviet Union refused to withdraw its forces from northern Iran and stated that it would hold a plebiscite to determine the wishes of the people. What became known as the Azerbaijan Crisis proved to be the first direct clash of the post-war era and many observers regard it as the opening salvo of the Cold War.[14] The issue was successfully resolved as a result of strong American and British pressure in the United Nations, and because the US was by far the strongest global military power. Although the resolution of the crisis did not involve the use of US ground forces, the confrontation with the Soviets attracted attention in Washington and served to strengthen US resolve just as containment was about to be put forward as a policy option.

In fact, the Azerbaijan Crisis was the first of three significant events in the evolution of containment policy as it came to influence the US-Indian Ocean relationship. The second, Mao Tse Tung's victory in China, at its most basic level, raised the spectre of a monolithic communist bloc

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[14] See: Gary Sick, "The Evolution of US Strategy Toward the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf Regions," in Alvin Z. Rubinstein, The Great Game, New York: Praeger, 1983 p. 51.

controlling the Eurasian land mass.[15] This was to become of heightened policy significance in Indian Ocean terms following the Sino-Indian border war of 1962, when for a time it seemed as if the communist hordes were about to break out of their confines and sweep down onto the plains of India.

The year 1962, provided the proof that containment was both necessary and prudent if US interests were to be preserved. In fact, the Sino-Indian war simply confirmed the concern that had been rising in some quarters ever since the French defeat in Vietnam. The French collapse at Dien Bien Phu had raised the possibility of broader communist victories to come, leading to Eisenhower's description of the nations of South East Asia as a row of dominoes just waiting to be pushed over. The US therefore began to look for regional allies who could stand together and prevent the rest of the dominoes from falling. The alliance relationships thus developed were to have a significant impact on future US policy towards the Indian Ocean region. US concern over developments in Vietnam in the early 1950s was to lead to the beginning of the multilateral alliances which came to represent containment policy of the ground in Asia.

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[15] This demonstrates the influence of the early geopolitical theorists on US policymakers. In 1904, in "the Geographical Pivot of History," Sir Halford Mackinder presented his theory that Euro-Asia was the pivotal region in determining world power. Who controlled Eurasia, Mackinder's "Heartland," would rule the world. Mackinder's article, rightly or wrongly, had immeasurable influence on the development of geopolitical thought. Nicholas Spykman, in 1944, modified Mackinder's theory on the basis of the experiences of World War II. According to Spykman, Mackinder's Heartland was subject to the control of the maritime powers operating in the "Rimland," the area between the sea and the Eurasian landmass. Hence, "Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world." See: Roger Kasperson and Julian Minghi, (eds), The Structure of Political Geography, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1971, pp. 161-177.

In 1951, Australia, New Zealand and the United States signed the Pacific Pact, or ANZUS alliance.[16] In September 1954, the US secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, persuaded Britain, Australia, New Zealand, France, Thailand, Pakistan and the Philippines to form the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). However, the absence of the two most populous nations in the region, India and Indonesia, together with Burma, was embarrassing and the alliance clearly looked like another western effort to regulate the affairs of Asia from the outside.

Eisenhower in fact stated as much by declaring, in a foreign policy briefing to President-elect Kennedy, that any intrusion in South East Asia would be dangerous to American security and that America should fight to prevent it.[17] Here then, in essence, is the first declared policy objective of the United States directed in part towards the Indian Ocean. It is in effect the beginning of a formal commitment to a region deemed vital to US interests.

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[16] The ANZUS treaty made no reference to the Indian Ocean, instead it referred in general terms to the Pacific and the Pacific Area. Nevertheless, because of Australia's large coastline on the Indian Ocean, the treaty has assumed significant Indian Ocean policy relevance in recent years. Although initially established in response to fears in Australia and New Zealand of a remilitarized Japan, ANZUS quickly became adept at finding new threats from China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Soviet Union. See: Thomas-Durrell Young, The Nearly Unique Experience: An Analysis of and Commentary on the Australian, New Zealand and United States Defence Relationship, 1951-1986, unpublished PhD Dissertation, the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, 1987.

[17] Michael Maclear, Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War, London: Methuen, 1981, p. 79.

Following the formation of SEATO, the Pact of Mutual Cooperation, or the Baghdad Pact, was signed in 1955 by Iraq and Turkey under US influence. The United Kingdom, Pakistan and Iran were subsequently to become members. Interestingly, the United States did not formally join the Baghdad Pact, or its successor, the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), but acted instead as an observer. The US preferred to develop bilateral relations with the individual nations, partly out of recognition of British predominance in the region, but also in order to maintain a low profile in an effort not to confront the local powers with an additional foreign presence. However, the overriding objective, at least as far as CENTO was concerned, was to encourage stability in a pro-Western Iran under the Shah, and to develop Saudi Arabia and Iraq as conservative forces supportive of US policy.[18]

Its role in both alliances secured the development of the security relationship with Pakistan which has dominated United States-South Asian relations almost exclusively ever since. Pakistan was looked upon favourably by the United States because of its reputation as the home of a warrior people. This was simply confirmed by Pakistan's eagerness to build up a modern military establishment. The territory of what was then West Pakistan, was particularly sought after because of its traditional role as the gateway to South Asia. Every historical land invasion of the Indian subcontinent had come through Pakistan and it was perceived to be of vital strategic significance. Conversely, a secure Pakistan would be an

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[18] In fact, the symbolism of a US military presence was seen to be a more importance than the actual US military capability in the region. The broader security relationship, encompassing arms sales, and military and technical assistance, was felt to be of greater significance to US interests. See: US Congress. Senate Committee of Foreign Relations. United States Foreign Policy Objectives and Overseas Military Installations, Washington: US GPO, 1979, p. 118.

invaluable asset to the United States in overseeing and securing access to its vital interests in the Persian Gulf. The US eagerness to embrace Pakistan was based, at least in part, on the failure to sway Indian prime minister Nehru from his non-aligned posture. The United States felt that South Asia was essential to the struggle against the growing communist threat. Dulles wanted to close the circle around monolithic communism; regional alliances were to be the means to this end, and so US-Pakistan relations flourished.

Overriding this, of course, was Pakistan's own perception of its role in the region. To Pakistan, the regional threat was perceived to be from India. In order to achieve some measure of strategic balance with its more powerful neighbour, Pakistan needed great power support. Therefore, for Pakistan and the United States, the alliance structure was mutually beneficial. By 1960 there were increasingly close links between the two countries, and a corresponding alienation between the US and India. This has been the continuing pattern of US relations with the region ever since, with the notable exception of one brief period immediately following the Sino-Indian border war.

By 1965, however, South Asia had declined in security importance for the United States. The Sino-Soviet split appeared to be a long-term, if not permanent, affair. India and Pakistan were so wrapped up in their quarrels and had gone to war, so they had come to be of little relevance to the overall strategy of containing the communists. Indeed, as a result of the India-Pakistan war of 1965, the United States immediately halted arms shipments to the region. This not

only generated resentment in Pakistan,[19] which was dependent on the US for its military equipment, but it also failed to gain the United States much political mileage with India. In fact, the US was upstaged by the Soviets, who mediated the dispute in the southern Soviet city of Tashkent. Nevertheless, the United States was beginning to establish an infrastructural framework in the Indian Ocean by which its global interests would be served.

In addition to the facilities in Eritrea and the Gulf, a Very Low Frequency communications station was opened at North West Cape in Australia in 1963. However, a major initiative taken during this period was to have far-reaching strategic significance for the United States in the Indian Ocean. In 1966, a fifty-year agreement was entered into with the British for the use of Diego Garcia as an "austere communications facility." Diego Garcia, an island in the Chagos Archipelago, lies almost in the geographical centre of the Indian Ocean. It has subsequently become the major US military facility in the region.[20] Whereas elements in the US strategic community

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[19] All credit sales of military equipment to Pakistan were ended and an embargo on cash sales of "lethal" weapons was enforced. As a result, following the events of 1965, US arms exports and military training became an insignificant factor outside the Gulf region. US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Foreign Policy Objectives and Overseas Military Installations, Washington: US GPO, 1979, p. 97.

[20] Diego Garcia now has a 12,000 ft. runway, a dredged harbour capable of holding a carrier battle group, and enough fuel supplies to support a carrier task force for 30 days. It is also home to pre-positioned ships carrying heavy equipment and supplies for the Central Command (Rapid Deployment Force). Despite the obvious potential of Diego Garcia, successive administrations have consistently downplayed its importance. In 1979, for example, it was stated, "Current plans envision only the occasional use of the facility as a port for US warships, and in fact the facility is seldom used by Navy ships as it is not convenient to normal sailing patterns."

had been pushing for such a facility for a long time,[21] the acquisition of Diego Garcia became the subject of intense debate in the US Congress in the early 1970s. Despite the controversy generated by the facility, in the context of the times its establishment was purely in keeping with the kind of activist and interventionist foreign policy espoused by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

For the greater part of the post-war period, therefore, US security policy towards the Indian Ocean evolved slowly. There was no pressing need for it to be otherwise. Although the United States had made incremental moves to enhance its position throughout the region, the Indian Ocean was essentially a "British Lake" and there was no overt threat to Western interests in the region. Besides, US attention and resources were diverted by the war in Vietnam and the Indian Ocean had even lost its importance as a transit route for US vessels following the closure of the Suez Canal in 1967.[22] In fact, the US navy had ended periodic deployments of its vessels in the region as a result of the demand on its resources from Vietnam. Indeed, aside from Vietnam, it has been argued that the Department of Defence resisted pressures from the White House to establish a permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean because of competing interests in the

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See: US Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. United States Foreign Policy Objectives and Overseas Military Installations, Washington: US GPO, 1979, p. 96.

[21] Plans to develop a facility on Diego Garcia had been developed as early as 1960. The island was selected because of its central location and future potential as a base--not simply to serve as an "austere communications facility." See: K.S. Jawatkar, Diego Garcia in International Diplomacy, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1983, p. 275. Moreover, by the late 1960s, communications requirements had largely been taken over by satellites and by facilities in Australia. See: Sick, op. cit., p. 55.

[22] Sick, op. cit., p. 55.

Atlantic and Pacific.[23] As a result, the United States was content to leave the protection of the region to the British.

When the Labour government of Harold Wilson announced its intention of withdrawing British forces from "East of Suez" in 1968, the United States expressed its concern and attempted to persuade them to stay.[24] However, the British were adamant and ended their 150-year hegemony in the Indian Ocean in 1971. Because of its heavy involvement in Vietnam, and because of the domestic unrest generated by the war and widespread opposition to further foreign adventures, the United States was unable, if not unwilling, to supplant the British in the Indian Ocean.

Although the United States maintained an interest in strategic affairs in the region and demonstrated this, in particular through naval deployments at the time of the war for the independence of Bangladesh and during the 1973 October War, US policy had fallen victim to its strategic neglect of the region. The United States had ignored the time-tested lesson of maritime history; that a sea power cannot function without secure bases. The United States had relied upon the British to provide such bases, at Singapore and at Aden. Now that the British had departed, the United States was left to pursue a baseless strategy in the region. The U.S. approach to the region was of necessity almost exclusively diplomatic, economic, and political, rather than of a military nature. This remained the case until the 1973 October War brought the Indian Ocean to the forefront of strategic attention in Washington.

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[23] Sick, op. cit., p. 54.

[24] See: Phillip Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez, London: Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 318 & 325.

Until the 1973 October War, the Gulf had been of little relevance to the Arab-Israeli dispute; however, the Arab oil embargo highlighted the strategic significance of the Persian Gulf as a sub-region of the Indian Ocean. It was recognized that a US military capability in the area would be extremely useful in any similar crisis in the future. Moreover, as a result of the war, the Indian Ocean took on a new importance as the back door to Israel.[25] At the same time, the war aroused broader strategic concerns in Washington because the Soviet Union had doubled its naval force levels in the Indian Ocean during the crisis. Nevertheless, although President Nixon decided to reestablish the pattern of regular naval visits into the ocean, he chose to focus the US security effort on regional surrogates.

Under the so called "Twin Pillar" policy, Saudi Arabia and Iran were to be built up militarily to defend America's interests in the region. However, there was never any question but that Iran was by far the most important regional actor and that it was to play the key role in support of American policy. This arrangement, which was an outcome of President Nixon's Guam Doctrine, was supposed to emphasize the need for America's allies to play a greater role in their own defence. As a result of the 1973 war, however, although US naval deployments in the Indian Ocean from the Pacific fleet were increased, so was the US military dependence on Iran.

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25 In a House Committee meeting in 1976, Admiral Gayler, (Commander in Chief, Pacific) was asked by Congressman Solarz, "...Are there any plans in place to utilize Diego Garcia as part of a stepping stone that will be necessary to airlift materials to Israel in the event...alternative routes are not available?" The Admiral nonchalantly replied, "I think about it once in a while...". US Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Future Foreign Policy Research and Development, Shifting Balance of Power in Asia: Implications for Future US Policy, Hearings, 94th Congress, Washington: US GPO, 1976, p. 58.

President Nixon began an arms sales relationship with the Shah that was to have a major impact on the future course of US policy in the region. As a result of the military might Iran came to possess, there developed the impression in Washington that the Shah was firmly in control of his country and in an unassailable position. This almost institutionalized misperception was later to hinder seriously US policy responses to the crisis preceding the Shah's downfall.

In the summer of 1975, President Ford succeeded in getting funds from a skeptical Congress for the construction of enhanced support facilities for US forces operating on the island of Diego Garcia. The Soviet build-up of base facilities in Somalia, it was said, made a US response, "essential to the national interest." In essence, the United States had been forced to develop a sea-based response to the Soviets by virtue of the failure of the land-based containment strategy to counter Soviet expansionism. The Indian Ocean seemed to be on the verge of becoming yet another cockpit for superpower rivalry as the US began to develop its military assets in the region.

2. The Soviet Union and the Indian Ocean Region

During the same period of the developing American-Indian Ocean relationship, the Soviet Union was also steadily increasing its influence in the region. In general, Soviet-Third World relations have dominated Moscow's Indian Ocean posture for most of the post-war period. Historically, Russian interests go back much further. Peter the Great wanted to have a warm-water port on the Indian Ocean, and his goal has been widely regarded as the driving force behind Soviet moves in the region ever since. Less well-known is the early Russian interest in the Horn of Africa. In the 1880s

Russian military advisers assisted Emperor Menelik II in consolidating the boundaries of Ethiopia. In 1888, a Cossack colony, sponsored by the Russian Orthodox Church, was established in what is now Djibouti, and a Russian hospital was opened in Addis Ababa in 1898. These initiatives collapsed during the Russian revolution and there was little Soviet involvement in the Horn until after World War II, when Moscow again opened a hospital in Addis Ababa--the first major Soviet aid project in Africa.[26]

Whereas US policy towards the Indian Ocean has always been primarily strategic, Soviet policy towards the most important part of the region has been driven by its competition with China for influence in the Third World. Khrushchev made early efforts to advance Indo-Soviet ties, for example, a relationship which led from cultural exchanges and technical assistance in the 1950s and 1960s, to the signing of a treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation in 1971. Other Soviet approaches to some of the littoral states--Egypt, the Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, South Yemen and Mozambique--were undoubtedly strategic but have been less than successful. Moscow was kicked out of Egypt and the Sudan in the early 1970s. A Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed with Somalia in 1974, but Moscow lost its foothold there in 1977 when it switched allegiance to Ethiopia during the Ogaden War. Today, the relationship with Ethiopia is probably more trouble than it is worth for Moscow, and Soviet ambivalence during the Iran-Iraq war has stunted its friendship with Baghdad. South Yemen, although firmly Marxist, has little to offer the Soviets where regional advantage is concerned, and Mozambique is demonstrating pro-Western tendencies. Therefore, India

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[26] See: Paul B. Henze, Russians and the Horn, Marina de Rey, California: EAI Papers, No. 5, Summer 1983.

remains the Soviet Union's most important and only enduring friend and ally in the region.

Almost immediately after the British announced their withdrawal from "East of Suez", the Soviet Union sent a fleet into the Indian Ocean. This early Soviet deployment, filling the "power vacuum" in the Indian Ocean, rang alarm bells in the West but was almost certainly not a response to the British withdrawal.[27] Others have argued that the Soviets were concerned that the United States was about to deploy ballistic missile submarines in the Arabian Sea and that Moscow was preparing for that eventuality. Again, the evidence does not lend credence to this scenario. Not only was the Indian Ocean an unattractive area for the operation of US submarines, being too far from major bases in terms of sailing time, the Soviets only deployed limited anti-submarine warfare assets in the ocean.[28] Similarly, Soviet threats to the oil shipment routes can be discounted in favour of other, more effective, means available to Moscow to disrupt the energy supplies to the West.[29] The most plausible explanation for the Soviet naval deployment in 1968 lies in the emergence of a "Blue Water" capability under the guidance of Admiral Gorshkov, and Moscow's determination to be recognized as a global power. Soviet naval deployments in the Indian Ocean have more to do with Moscow's need to demonstrate its right to

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[27] Long-range ship deployments take months to prepare and the Soviets were venturing into what were, for them, uncharted waters. The Soviet move followed so closely on the British announcement that it is more likely that the timing was a coincidence.

[28] See: Richard Haass, "Arms Control at Sea: The United States and the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean, 1977-78," in Alexander L. George, Philip J. Farley & Alexander Dallin, eds., US-Soviet Security Cooperation, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 526.

[29] Ibid, p. 526.

be there, than with any significant strategic purpose. For example, Soviet naval deployments in the Indian Ocean have not matched the United States' presence quantitatively or qualitatively. Whereas its role as a deterrent to the US forces is important, the Soviet naval presence serves more to extend Soviet political influence in the region and to counterbalance the political impact of Washington's naval deployments.

The sustained Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean has never approached that of the Americans, or even the French. In the past, Soviet naval deployments have tended to mirror American activity, that is, their presence increased as US carriers were deployed, and returned to normal levels when the task forces withdrew. Whenever this situation resulted in a quantitative advantage to the Soviets, it was more than offset by the distinct qualitative edge to the US presence. This loose equilibrium allowed the superpowers to avoid the monetary cost and political risk of a naval arms race in the Indian Ocean. Of course, Moscow has maintained significant numbers of warships in the region on occasion, but it has faced severe constraints on basing and resupply. In war time, its position would be untenable. Nevertheless, Soviet behaviour in the Indian Ocean region, in the late 1970s, gave Washington cause to focus on the perceived Soviet threat to Western interests.

In 1977, there was a dramatic shift in Soviet policy in the Horn of Africa. In the 1960s, Moscow had built up a security relationship with Somalia. The Somalis were given military training and equipment by Moscow in exchange for the use of a naval base at Berbera. However, the overthrow of Haile Selassie, the pro-US Emperor of Ethiopia in 1974, was a watershed in the affairs of the Horn. In early 1976, the revolutionary regime in Ethiopia approached the Soviets with a

request for arms to fight the secessionist struggle in Eritrea. Moscow agreed on condition that Ethiopia's ties to the United States be cut. In April 1977, Addis Ababa terminated relations with the United States and closed the Kagnew communications facility in Eritrea.

Whereas these measures clearly reflected the revolutionary Marxist leanings of the Ethiopian regime it should not be overlooked that the United States was also reappraising its relationships in the area. Ethiopia had declined in strategic importance with the closing of the Suez Canal, and the Eritrean station was less crucial for the US global communications network with the advent of satellite systems and the transference of some of Kagnew's functions to Diego Garcia. Moreover, President Carter's concern for human rights encouraged a reassessment of America's traditional role in Ethiopia. These factors, in combination with growing Arab opposition to the Soviet presence in the Middle East, led Moscow to abandon its long-standing relationship with Somalia in favour of Ethiopia during the Ogaden War.

Despite wide-spread indifference in Washington to the Soviet switch, it was clear to some observers that Moscow had scored a major strategic victory. The United States had suffered a net loss in its global rivalry with the Soviet Union. Moscow had gained a position in the most important country in the Horn, and Washington was politically unable to counter it. An about-turn in favour of Somalia, with its radical regime and strong anti-Israel stance, was simply not a viable option for the United States. Other than extracting assurances from the Soviets that they would not permit the Ethiopians to violate Somali territory in their drive to recapture the Ogaden, the United States was unable to influence events in the region. To many observers, the weak US response to the crisis in the Horn of Africa can be blamed

for all the subsequent foreign policy failures of the Carter administration. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's national security adviser, provided the most melodramatic interpretation of the importance of the crisis in the Horn: "SALT lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden."[30]

The Ogaden crisis is rightly considered as a major test of the foreign policy acumen of the Carter administration but it is important to note, for the purposes of this study, that it also marks a change in the focus of superpower attention in the Indian Ocean. It was the beginning of an emphasis on strategic issues between the superpowers in the Indian Ocean. Whereas the superpowers had previously, almost exclusively, aimed at securing influence in the littoral states, now they were explicitly pursuing a strategic advantage over their rival.[31] Following the Ogaden War, the United States was given a brief scare with a "mini-crisis" in the Yemens and then suffered a major geopolitical defeat when the Shah of Iran was overthrown. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, in December 1979, was widely regarded as the proof that the Soviets had a master plan to surround the crucial Gulf area with forces hostile to the United States. President Carter made clear his feelings regarding Soviet activities in the region, and raised the strategic stakes, with his State of the Union address on 23 January 1980:

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[30] See: Zbigniew Brzezinski, Power and Principle, New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983, pp. 178-190.

[31] Harish Kapur, "Great Powers and the Indian Ocean," Round Table, January 1986, pp. 51-52.

> Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.[32]

The question of what Soviet intentions were, however, has never been adequately addressed. The invasion was a major departure from Soviet foreign policy. It marked the first time that Moscow had used its own troops outside the Warsaw Pact area since the end of World War II and it is still difficult to understand the reasons for the action. A combination of factors--fear of religious unrest in the Soviet Muslim Republics, arising out of Khomeini's revolution in Iran; concern over possible US military intervention to rescue the embassy hostages in Teheran; and the desire to stabilize a deteriorating political situation in Afghanistan--have been considered as the most likely reasons. It was, perhaps, simply an opportunistic response to a perceived US weakness in the region. Whatever the inspiration, the Soviets suffered heavy political damage in their relations with the Third World as a result of the invasion, and subsequent events have shown it to have been a foreign policy blunder of enormous proportions. The Soviet Union has at last recognized the futility of its position in Afghanistan and has begun to withdraw its troops. Despite the current suspension of the withdrawal process, most analysts expect Moscow to abide by the terms of the Geneva Accord and end its intervention in Afghanistan in February, 1989.

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32 Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith, New York: Bantam Books, 1983, p. 483.

CONCLUSION

President Carter pledged the United States to defend the Gulf as a response to a perceived threat to Western security, should free access to the oil supplies of the region be denied by a hostile power. The Carter Doctrine was, therefore, a formal reconfirmation of the historical US policy objective in the Indian Ocean, which is both to secure access to the oil supplies of the Gulf, and to ensure the safety of the sea lanes by which they are transported. The United States viewed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a direct challenge to its fundamental security interests and responded with a military build-up of its naval forces in the Indian Ocean. the burgeoning war between Iran and Iraq reinforced Washington's justification for pursuing the military option and subsequently replaced the Soviet threat from Afghanistan as the leading strategic concern in the region.

When the United States deployed carriers in response to the crises in Southwest Asia, it had no military alternative. Since then, the United States has developed the capacity to offer a credible land deterrent to any Soviet move on the Gulf. New regional access arrangements, the upgrading of facilities at the US base on Diego Garcia, and the prepositioning of heavy equipment in the region, ensure a rapid and sustainable reaction by the unified units of Central Command. Moreover, the industrialized world has not been idle since the oil crises of the 1979s. Measures taken to diversify supply and to develop alternative sources of energy, together with conservation efforts and emergency stockpiling, have reduced the risk factor of any sudden cut-off of oil supplies. The world oil glut, depressed prices, and the current disorder in OPEC, all attest to the success of these initiatives in reducing dependence on Middle East oil. The security of

Persian Gulf oil supplies is simply far less significant than was the case at the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

These changes in the strategic picture, which represent improvements from the US perspective, are predicated on future Soviet challenges to Washington's interests in the region. However, if the Carter Doctrine served notice on the Soviets that the United States would tolerate no more Afghanistans, surely the Soviet retreat from Kabul signals that Moscow does not want any more either. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan generated US responses which presented opportunities for confrontation at both the local and the superpower level. However, the responses do not correspond to the reality of the threats to Western interests in the region. If the Soviets could not defeat the Afghan resistance, then their chances of successfully subjugating Iran are obviously nil. Hence, there is no legitimate conventional Soviet military threat to the Persian Gulf. Furthermore, the energy supplies of the Gulf are not at risk from maritime interdiction, in particular not from Soviet naval forces in the Indian Ocean. In fact, history demonstrates that the real threat to the Gulf comes from instability in Southwest Asia. The United States needs to develop policies and strategies to meet threats of a lower order--insurgencies, terrorism and sabotage--against its friends in the Gulf region. Naval battle groups are ill-suited for such tasks and their presence in the region is unnecessary.

One repercussion of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was the abandonment of efforts to stabilize naval force levels between the superpowers in the Indian Ocean.[33] The current geopolitical situation in the Indian Ocean region suggests that it is now appropriate to consider Naval Arms Limitation Talks (NALTS) again. The initial premise of the NALTS discussion was that it was in the interests of both superpowers to reduce the potential for confrontation in a region of relatively low strategic importance. This remains the case and, from the US and Soviet perspective, the benefits for reconsidering this approach are evident.

The naval deployments of both superpowers in the Indian Ocean have long been a cause for concern for the littoral states. Since 1971, efforts have been made through the United Nations to have the entire ocean declared a Zone of Peace. When this proposal was first introduced, by Sri Lanka with Indian support, it was taken to apply to all naval forces, local and external. The concept has since come to refer purely to the military presence of external powers, for obvious reasons of local self-interest. Although the ultimate hope of the Zone of Peace proposal is the elimination of all aspects of the superpower presence in the Indian Ocean, this is clearly viewed as a long-term prospect. The superpowers, and other maritime nations, have consistently rejected the concept of a Zone of Peace arguing that it implies some sort of legal regime which would restrict the rightful passage of their vessels in international waters. However, this is something of a red-herring designed to stall debate on the concept.

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[33] Naval Arms Limitation Talks, or NALTS, were part of a package of arms control measures, introduced early in the Carter administration, designed to sound out the possibilities for coooperation with the Soviet Union.

In reality, nobody questions the codified rights of passage on the high seas. What is at issue, and where the greatest littoral-state concern lies, is the question of the permanent deployment of such forces. The fear of the littoral states is that they might unwittingly be drawn into a super-power confrontation as a result of the presence of their warships in the Indian Ocean. A naval arms limitation agreement, restricting outside force levels to a token permanent presence, would ease these fears and lead to general benefits for the superpowers in the form of better relations with the littoral states. On the basis of the tangible improvement in energy security, and because of the new strategic elements introduced since 1980, there is little justification for the superpowers to maintain more than a nominal naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Indeed, there are far more effective ways, for the Soviet Union and United States to support their friends in the area.

As a confidence-building measure and demilitarization initiative, the NALTS proposal was both rational and attainable. Moreover, it was very attractive to local governments. This point is not lost on the Soviet Union, which recognizes the broader political advantages to a negotiated settlement in the area. Since the NALTS collapsed, Moscow has consistently called for their resumption. Diplomatic efforts towards this end, through the offices of the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace, have thus far been stymied by US insistence that any formal debate on the issue be linked to a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Now that the question of Afghanistan has been resolved, it is incumbent on the United States to readdress Naval Arms Limitation Talks with the Soviets in the Indian Ocean.

The littoral states have begun to play a greater role in strategic affairs in the region. India, in particular, has embarked on an expansion of its naval power projection capability which concerns its neighbours and is potentially destabilizing. The nuclear proliferation issue in South Asia threatens not only India and Pakistan, but also the rest of the world. Conflicts like the Iran-Iraq war demonstrate that marginal powers can drag great powers into their quarrels, with untold consequences. Scarce resources will continue to trigger crises and hostility for the foreseeable future. With the Soviets withdrawing from Afghanistan, and the Iran-Iraq war ostensibly over, there is the potential for the superpowers to return the Indian Ocean to its traditional low-order priority in their strategic affairs. It is important that they do so. The superpowers need to be free to develop their cooperative confidence-building measures in this important region in order to be better able to manage the rapidly changing challenges to international peace and security.

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